

The Sun.

BOOKS AND THE BOOK WORLD

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13, 1918.

THE Fall Number of *Books and the Book World*, appearing next Sunday, will, with the exception of the article on rare books and the list of books received, be given over entirely to news of new books. It will be an all review number. It will contain, aside from the list of books received in the week, no list of fall publications. The completest possible list of the season's books is afforded by our weekly lists; and to repeat them seems superfluous.

But there will be lots of news about a number of the most important of the fall's books. On the front page BOOTH TARKINGTON's new novel will be considered. On the editorial page a remarkable sea story, *Under Sail*, will have attention. Mr. CHESTERTON's letter deals with a book by an American reporter already published in this country. The article upon *The Life and Letters of Joel Chandler Harris* contains two unusually interesting and, we believe, hitherto unpublished letters by the creator of Uncle Remus. The first publication of three plays by BARRIE will be made the occasion for a consideration of BARRIE the dramatist.

But something must be left to the anticipation.

Mary Austin.

[Typewritten.]

"INDEPENDENCE, Cal.,
Nov. 25th, 1902.

"Messrs. Houghton, Mifflin and Co.;

"GENTLEMEN,

"Enclosed you will find the biographical sketch of my life and some account of my work, in reply to your request for the same. I have no doubt that you can get some expression of opinion from Mr. MUIR in regard to my book *A Land of Little Rain*, but I will take pains to make sure of the matter and write you again in regard to it. CHAS. F. LUMMIS, editor of *Out West*, and GEORGE HAMLIN FITCH, literary editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and also the reviewer of the *Argonaut*, can be counted on to give me some friendly notice, especially LUMMIS, as he is my first and warmest friend in the West. . . . I have written the biographical sketch in the third person to avoid the use of so many 'I's', which always makes me miserable, you can cut out all that is not to the point.

"Sincerely yours,

"MARY AUSTIN."

[Written.]

"P. S. I am afraid you will be disappointed with the notes but it is the best I can do.
Autobiographical.

[Enclosure. Typewritten.]

"MARY HUNTER AUSTIN was born in Carlinville, Ill., descended on her mother's side from the family of the celebrated French chemist, DAGUERRE. Being born fortunately before the flood of so-called children's books, she began to be familiar with the English classics as soon as she could read, and the study of these and an intimate acquaintance with nature occupied most of the years until the end of her university work. At that time very serious ill health drove her to California, and a friendly destiny provided that she should settle in the new and untamed lands about the Sierra Nevadas and the desert edges. Although not yet twenty, she had already made some preparation for following the profession of teaching, and in the unconventional life of mining towns, and in the wickiups of the Indians found exceptional opportunities for pushing her investigations in child-study.

"Mrs. AUSTIN's work in this direction met with instant recognition in her State, and before long many excellent positions were open to her, but by this time she discovered that she did not want them. Like most desert dwellers, Mrs. AUSTIN had come under the spell of its mystery, and after teaching a short time in the Los Angeles Normal School, was glad to return to the life of the hills, and soon after began to devote herself seriously to writing.

"Very early her work attracted the attention of the *Atlantic Monthly*, *St. Nicholas* and the *Youth's Companion*. Most of the monthly magazines have published work of hers.

"All of MARY AUSTIN's work is like her life, out of doors, nights under the pines, long days' watchings by water holes to see the wild things drink, breaking trail up new slopes, heat, cloud bursts, snow, wild beast and mountain bloom, all equally delightful because understood."

Intimacies.

[At this point the typewriting stops; the "biographical notes" continue in pen and ink, Mrs. AUSTIN writing on both sides of the sheets of paper.]

"N. B. I can't do it. When I wrote the letter that accompanies this I thought it would be easy to do, but it isn't. There is really nothing to tell. I have just looked, nothing more. When I was too sick to do anything else I could lie out under the

sage brush and look, and when I was able to get about I went to look at other things, and by and by I got to know when and where looking was most worth while. Then I got so full of looking that I had to write to get rid of some of it to make room for more. I was only two months writing *A Land of Little Rain* but I spent 12 years pecking and prying before I began it. After a while I will write a book about my brother the coyote which will make you 'sit up.' I mean that is the way I feel about it.

"I have considered a long while, to see if I have any interesting eccentricities such as make people want to buy the books of the people who have them, but I think not. You are to figure to yourself a small, plain, brown woman with too much hair, always a little sick, and always busy about the fields and the mesas in a manner, so they say in the village, as if I should like to see anybody try to stop me.

"Years ago I was a good shot, but as I grew more acquainted with the ways of wild folks I found it lie heavy on my conscience, and so latterly have given it up. I have a house by the rill of Pine Creek, looking toward Kearsarge, and the sage brush grows up to the door. As for the villagers they have accepted me on the same basis as the weather, an institution which there is no use trying to account for. Two years ago I delivered the Fourth of July oration here, and if, when there is no minister of any sort here, as frequently happens, I go and ring the church bell, they will come in to hear me in the most natural manner.

Stage Coach and Indians.

"When I go out of this valley (Owens) to attend or to talk to large educational gatherings I ride 130 miles in the stage across the desert to Mojave, and the driver lets me hold the lines. Once when he said the water of Mojave made him sick, I put him inside and took the stage in from Red Rock to Coyote Holes. The other passengers, who were a barber with a wooden leg, and a Londoner, head of a mining syndicate, took care of my baby. You see I was the only one who knew how to drive four horses.

"For a long time before I came to Independence, I lived in Lone Pine, where the population is two-thirds Mexican and there gained the knowledge of their character which informs many of my stories. I should say that my husband who is Register of the U. S. Land office, is also a botanist and much of my outdoor life is by way of assisting his field work.

"Now for my work—the best is *A Land of Little Rain*, and the child verse in the *St. Nicholas*. I think the best and worst of it is that I am a little too near to my material. Where I seem to skimp a little, I can understand now that the book is cold, it was only that I presupposed a greater knowledge in the reader. During the last six months I have discovered that the same thing is happening to me that I complained of in Jimville.—the desert has 'struck in.' But I shall do better work, and still better. I am pleased to learn through some of my editor friends that my verse is rather better paid for and more widely copied than the average product of verse makers, and I conceive it possible that this might be traced to the influence of Piute and Shoshone medicine men and Dancers who are the only poets I personally know. For consider how I get nearer to the root of the poetic impulse among these single-hearted savages than any other where. But if I write at length upon this point you will say with my friend KERN RIVER JIM, 'This all blame foolishness.' And this brings me to my work among the Indians in which I am somewhat generally misrepresented. If I deny what is commonly reported, that the Indians regard me worshipfully for the good I do, then is the denial taken for modesty which it is not, but merely truth. They tell me things because I am really interested and a little for the sake of small favors but mostly because I give them no rest until they do. Says my friend KERN RIVER JIM, 'What for you learn them Injun songs? You can't sing um, You go learn songs in a book, that's good enough for you.' Nevertheless I have been able to do them nearly as much good as they have done me.

"This is the best I can do for you in this way—but whatever you are minded to say of my work say this—that I have been writing only four or five years and have not yet come to my full power, nor will yet for some years more."

So wrote MARY AUSTIN in late fall, 1902. Very nearly a year later Houghton Mifflin Company published *The Land of Little Rain*, a collection of fourteen sketches that were read with admiration and joy, that are rediscovered every year, that established incontestably MARY AUSTIN's qualifications as a writer.

"The Land of Little Rain."

"East away from the Sierras, south from Panamint and Amargosa, east and south many an uncounted mile, is the Country of Lost Borders.

"Ute, Paiute, Mojave and Shoshone inhabit its frontiers, and as far into the heart of it as men dare go. Not the law, but the land sets the limit. Desert is the name it wears upon the maps, but the In-

dian's is the better word. Desert is a loose term to indicate land that supports no man; whether the land can be bitten and broken to that purpose is not proven."

The reader draws in his breath sharply. This is a writer! And she has style. Yes, but so have dozens of others. And they never do anything with it. They write charming little essays, fanciful, forgotten. What else has she?

She has keen eyes, a keen mind, a heart to understand and a silence and time to come to the understanding. This much you make sure of as you go deeper into the book, reading the accounts of *The Pocket Hunter* and *Jimville: A Bret Harte Town*. When you have finished you know Mrs. AUSTIN's promise, but unless you have read her later books you do not know her performance.

It began right after the appearance of *The Land of Little Rain* with her next work, the novel *Isidro*, a romance dealing with the California of the padres, and it reached its high and sustained level with *A Woman of Genius*.

A Tale With Point.

She did not remain on the edge of the desert. To do so would have been fatal. She moved about and with benefit to herself and her work. Now she lives in a house facing on Gramercy Park, New York, where she has a studio. She has exchanged the Mojave desert for the desert of Manhattan, but she is sheltered in an oasis touched with the lingering loveliness of the New York H. C. BUNNER knew. Ask her about the advantages of her new environment and she will tell you a story:

"A young Californian who came East to try his fortune gravitated naturally to Washington Square, where *Genius* is supposed to germinate. He was personally conducted to the Liberal Club, where a young woman in bobbed hair and a futurist dress asked him if he didn't think the Liberal Club the most remarkable thing in America.

"Well," said the Westerner, "there's the Grand Canyon, you know."

"There you have it," concludes Mrs. AUSTIN. "If you haven't seen the Grand Canyon you had better keep away from the Liberal Club; but once you have caught the lift and bigness of America outside New York, then New York is the most inspiring place in the world in which to work."

The truth is that the desert moulded MARY AUSTIN without stunting her. She is like one of those desert plants of which she tells us whose maturity may be attained at ten feet or four inches, according to moisture and the region in which they grow. Herself, she is a desert species—but transplanted in time!

The Coming War of Ideas.

ON the psychological side this war is a tremendous and oceanic reaction against intellectualism. It is a protest against the brain. It is a protest against supereivilization. It is a rank, honest impulse making war against Knowledge.

We know too much. We feel too much. We have done too much. We have invented too much. We have read too much. We have predicted too much. We have suffered too much. We have been too cocksure.

The reaction after the war will be felt first of all in literature. All things are born of their opposites. After these sleepless hundred years we need a dose of oblivion. The problem novel and the problem play will disappear. The corpse of the past must be buried. There will be new kinds of flowers. A new Tree of Good and Evil is taking root.

In the new Renaissance the Fantastic will stand face to face with the Realist. IBSSEN and ZOLA and their spawn will come face to face with the Dunsanyes, the Grimms, the Aesops and the Lewis Carrolls of the coming time. There will be an Armageddon of Ideas in literature.

And, as one prediction is as good as another, we predict the complete annihilation of Common Sense by the Imagination. We are to-day tremendously awake, fearfully real. And at the end of the catastrophe the human soul will demand anodynes, tramps in the Wilderness of the Unreal, the hallucinating dreams of great poets and fantastic tale-tellers.

The world will cry for a Vision. For that which cannot be seen with the eye or touched by the hand. It will need, as an organic necessity, bards and troubadours, magicians and exalted prophets. The effulgent Latin imagination and the rhapsodic Slavic music will come into their own. There will be an orgy of Beauty, unrelated to psychological or social theories, in the world of art.

We are famished for dreams. We are trying even now to liberate the stars from the crucibles of Science. The garrets of heaven will be turned into domes of many colored glass. Life will become lyrical, mystical, Dionysiac. We shall take the sun helmets off our heads and see SHELLEY and LEONARDO and ANACREON and SHAKESPEARE walking the radiant spaces. And APHRODITE.

Let us call the legend makers and the myth makers from the vasty deeps of this our supreme tragedy, and they will come!